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FLEEING THE NAZIS: THE GERMAN AND AUSTRIAN-JEWISH DOCTORS AT SPRINGFIELD STATE HOSPITAL

BY JACK MCBRIDE WHITE

A few times in her later years, Eva Salomon gathered her friends, Irene Hitchman and Kurt Glaser, at her house on a small side street in Sykesville, where most likely they talked of pleasant things. Irene's daughter graduated from Columbia Law School in 1969. Both Kurt's sons had become doctors. Eva had nieces and nephews and good friends.

But they might also have talked of places and events that very few others could possibly understand: Berlin, Vienna, Shanghai, Dachau, *Kristallnacht*, *Anschluss*, Auschwitz, the Fuhrer's rise, and all the horrible things that happened to people they knew and millions they didn't. Or they might talk about work and surely did, although that was another dark, secret world that only those who'd been there could truly understand.

Sykesville wasn't much of a town when the first of them arrived in the early forties, as the war began, and the Depression ended. The bank had failed in the early 1930s. Many farms had gone under. Half of Main Street had burned in 1937. It was a poor and dirty place that ran its garbage and sewage straight into the Patapsco River that flowed alongside the railroad tracks at the south end of town.

But it wasn't Sykesville that brought them to Carroll County. It was the massive institution just

outside town. Still operating today as the Springfield Hospital Center, it opened in 1896 as the Second Maryland Hospital for the Insane. By 1939, when Hitler invaded Poland and launched the Second World War, Springfield's combined patient and employee population was larger than that of the town it bordered. It had become the county's number one employer, and also the largest institution of its type in the state. However, it was terribly overcrowded, underfunded, understaffed, and unsanitary.

Dr. Kenneth Jones, a graduate of the University of Maryland, took over as superintendent in 1940, and even before he could remedy some chronic deficiencies, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Money dried up, supplies dwindled, and soon Dr. Jones was losing attendants, nurses, cooks, farmhands, and professional staff to the war. Desperate for help, he recruited workers from the state penitentiary. He hired conscientious objectors. And he welcomed those doctors and psychiatrists who had escaped near certain death in their homelands and needed new homes and work, but they weren't certified to practice medicine in the United States.

Most of them came from Germany: Martin and Gertrude Gross, Joseph and Gertrude Sonnenfeldt, Eva and Herman Salomon, Ilsa Joekel, among others. Several came from Austria: Joseph Mandel and Ilsa Kamm, Irene



1950s aerial view of the sprawling Springfield Hospital complex. The women's wards are in the right foreground and comprise what is known as the Warfield complex today. (Courtesy of Sykesville Gate House Museum)

Hitchman, Kurt Glaser, and Fritz Kobler. Some came directly to Springfield; others went to another mental health institution first and later made their way to Sykesville.

What they found was a remarkable place with over 2,600 patients, 1,200 acres of land, 32 buildings, a power plant, laundry, ice plant, and cannery, along with machine, paint, carpenter, and blacksmith shops. There was a complete dairy farm with two barns, 100 cows, and a pasteurization plant. There was a chicken farm, a piggery with 250 pigs, and 150 acres of lawn and roads. Springfield had opened with great promise and lofty ideals 50 years earlier, but the once beautiful buildings, designed by some of Maryland's best architects, were packed now with beds and people. The hardwood floors were stained. In the worst of the wards, the stench was overwhelming. And the original philosophy of treatment—no bars on windows, no locks on doors, where the only therapy would be arduous work—was long abandoned. Windows were barred now; people were constrained in chairs and beds; treatment was mostly ineffective and often barbaric. The doctors had tried hydrotherapy and insulin shock therapy and were now using electroshock therapy and even a primitive brain surgery called the frontal lobotomy.

"What's a mortgage?"

Eva Rosenberg was born in 1900 in Germany. She had servants as a child. She knew nothing about household chores. She never learned to cook. She was kind-hearted and deeply opposed to war in a country that was inclined to start them. When the German Army drafted her brother during World War I, she vowed not to eat until he returned. When he did, she was 17 and weighed 75 pounds. She married Herman Salomon, the son of a wealthy business owner in 1925. Herman was a doctor who loved his work, despised money, and felt guilty accepting payment for his services.

The Salomons owned a nice place in Berlin. During the 1930s, they tried to ignore Hitler's politics. They considered him ridiculous with his mustache, crude grammar, and rantings about a Master Race. And then one night a Gestapo agent invited himself into their home. He had papers, facts, numbers, questions about their finances, and a car outside with its lights on and engine running, waiting to take them away. But when the man asked about their mortgage, Herman turned to Eva and asked, "What is a mortgage?" It seemed to disarm the Nazi. He told the man in the car there was nothing there, go on to the next house. It seemed like mercy and bordered on a miracle.

Herman did not want to leave Germany, but it was clear they had stayed too long. Eva was 38. Her parents had died; Herman's had escaped to Italy with a bit of money. The Salomons sold most of their things and arranged to have the rest shipped by their German friends. They bribed Nazi officers and eventually departed from Cologne with precious, expensively procured American passports. They were on a ship to New York on November 9, 1938, the day the Nazis let loose all over Austria and Germany—destroying hundreds of synagogues, including every one in Austria, damaging an estimated 7,000 Jewish businesses, lighting fires and smashing windows, killing hundreds of Jews, and rounding up some 30,000. The Jews called it *Kristallnacht*, the night of broken glass, after the countless shards that filled the streets and sidewalks 48 hours after it all began.

The Salomons arrived in New York with \$10 and moved into a modest neighborhood in Queens. Herman was not certified to practice medicine in the United States. Eva worked as a peddler in New York's streets, selling stockings and aprons and making just enough to keep them going. Herman was disconsolate, but Eva was strangely happy. It was an adventure. She heard of a hospital in Maryland hiring refugee doctors. Herman went there, and Dr. Jones hired him. Eva joined him a year later. In those days, staff had to live on the grounds of the hospital. They were given a house and a salary, and the beginnings of a new life. Sadly, Herman died at age 55 in 1955, and Eva lived most of that life alone.

Eva discovered that she liked the patients and was surprised she could talk with them. In a January 24, 1988, *Carroll County Times* interview, she admitted, "When I first came to Springfield I was afraid of mental patients. I had a picture of raving maniacs. I learned how people could be helped. To use the energy they concentrated on being sick to get well."

Eva also came under the influence of an American named Henrietta DeWitt, a gifted sociologist, who had begun a program at Springfield that captured the attention of the country. Known as The Maryland Plan, it involved moving the institutionalized gradually back into society through a system of foster care. Eva decided she would become a sociologist and a U.S. citizen and devote herself to DeWitt's system.

She received her citizenship at the federal courthouse in New York on June 6, 1944, the same day allied troops landed on the beaches in France. It was D-Day, and she was grateful. In a 1994 interview with Dan Rodricks of *The Baltimore Sun*, she said, "I thought, 'How generous this country is to make enemy aliens citizens.' I went to the courthouse on clouds, and when I became a citizen, I felt completely different."

Eventually Eva earned her Master's degree in Social Work from the University of Pennsylvania in 1952. Soon she was teaching classes, giving talks, authoring papers, and expressing complex sociological concepts in fluent spoken and written

English. She had arrived at 40 as a novice nurse with a strong German accent. By 55 she was Eva Salomon, M.S.W., Director of Social Services at Springfield State Hospital.

"Little Vienna"

The Germans wanted the Jews out of Austria. But, for the most part, no other country would let them in. The exception was Shanghai, some 6,000 miles away in China. It was an open city with a thriving international community and a small existing population of mostly Ashkenazi Jews. No entrance visa was required. As conditions worsened in Austria and the Jewish population shrank from 192,000 in 1938 to 57,000 by 1940, some 20,000 Jews made their way on packed ships to Shanghai, which had been seized by Japan in 1932. There they established a "little Vienna" inside China's most densely populated city. But in 1943, under pressure from their German allies, the Japanese forced all Jews into a squalid one-square-mile ghetto in the section of the city known as the Hongkou District. Whatever their former status, most were now destitute and homeless.

Still, some managed to thrive. Among those were Dr. Arthur Mandel, who grew up and studied in Vienna and became a professor at National Shanghai Medical College. He reached America in 1949 and was appointed Director of Research at Springfield. He married psychologist Ilse Kamm, another refugee of war, who went on to practice at Springfield for 25 years.

Fritz Kobler, a brilliant psychiatrist who fled from Austria to Shanghai where he taught himself Mandarin Chinese, also eventually moved to Maryland. He served as Clinical Director at Springfield from the mid-1960s into the 1980s, a tenure that overlapped Arthur Mandel's. Kobler settled in Catonsville where he lived for 40 years.

But no one who came from Austria through Shanghai to Sykesville had greater success or a more profound impact than Irene Hitchman. Born in 1908, she was the daughter of an Austrian rabbi, Joseph Link. In 1914, when Irene was six, the rabbi moved his family to Innsbruck, a chiefly Catholic city in the Austrian Alps with a history of antisemitism.

Irene married Max Hitschman in 1938. (They later changed the spelling to Hitchman.) She studied psychiatry and worked at a neurological clinic in Innsbruck and a hospital in Vienna from 1933 to 1938. During *Kristallnacht*, her husband was arrested and taken to an abandoned munitions factory called Dachau, where Heinrich Himmler had established the first of the concentration camps. He joined about 11,000 other Jews who were held there and forced into hard labor. Max was eventually released with the understanding that he would leave the country as soon as possible. After giving up almost everything they owned, the Hitchmans boarded a ship for Shanghai. But unlike Doctors Kobler and Mandel, they did not linger in China. Somehow they acquired entry permits to the United States and arrived in Sykesville in 1941. Irene started as a nurse. By 1943, she was a staff psychiatrist.

Like the Salomons, the Hitchmans were given a house on the hospital grounds. Irene would later say, "I owe my biggest debt of gratitude to the people on the Springfield staff, who showed us we were accepted as people after our whole way of life had been uprooted in Austria. We were to live at the hospital, and when we arrived we found flowers in our room... Those people accepted my husband and me and my daughter... We felt we had found a real home in this country."

Irene was about 33 and performed so well and rose so quickly that by 1954, at 45, she was both Clinical Director of Springfield and Director of Psychiatric Education. She developed classes. She taught. She gave speeches and authored papers. She conducted various lines of research with Dr. Martin Gross, a German refugee and the hospital's Director of Research. In 1959, she secured a \$100,000 grant from the National Institutes of Health to study the long-term effectiveness of various promising new drugs that would soon help revolutionize the treatment of psychiatric illness. In 1962 she left Carroll County for Baltimore and became Director of Inspection and Licensure for the Maryland Department of Mental Health and Hygiene. On January 1, 1969, she became Deputy Commissioner, the second highest position in the Maryland Department of Mental Hygiene. No woman had ever risen that high.



Irene Hitchman with an unknown companion, possibly her husband, Max. (Courtesy of Sykesville Gate House Museum)

"Don't dance with the Jew"

When Kurt Glaser was born in 1915, his father, Richard, was a member of the Austrian army and a Russian prisoner of war in Siberia, where he was held with thousands of others from 1914 to 1921. When he finally came home, Kurt was six and living in a small apartment in Innsbruck with his mother and grandmother. He was an unhappy child but a brilliant student. His newly freed father was a stranger, who smoked constantly and suffered terrible coughing fits that left him wheezing and fighting for breath. Though Richard was a kind man, he had a violent temper. He screamed when angered and had an extremely strict sense of right and wrong.

Kurt's mother gave birth to another son a year after Richard's return, and that made five living in a small space filled with cigarette smoke and the constant wailing of a newborn baby. Kurt

was the only Jew in his school and subject to frequent humiliation both in class and out. On the streets people called him “Jewish pig” behind his back. His classmates pummeled him with rocks after a priest told them it was the Jews who had killed Christ. He was humiliated at a dance when the Catholic boys told the girls, “Don’t dance with the Jew.”

The 300 Jews of Innsbruck were poor and greatly outnumbered. They had no synagogue and held services on the second floor of someone’s house. Motivated by fury and frustration, Kurt became a Zionist and the leader of Innsbruck’s more radical young Jews who believed they should establish a homeland in Palestine. It was a divisive issue.

Eventually, his father found success with a German firm, Steinmetz whole grain bread, and the Glaser family moved from their cramped quarters in Innsbruck to a nice villa in Vienna, where Kurt pursued a degree in medicine. Richard had a car and a chauffeur. Kurt excelled at school. Just as Kurt neared the end of his third year of training, his father received devastating news from company headquarters in Berlin. He had been fired without explanation and without recourse. His bookkeeper, a Nazi, was now in charge of the business that Richard had built with his own skill and passion and money.

On *Yom Kippur* of 1935, Richard Glaser confronted the bookkeeper on the streets of Vienna. They exchanged words, and then Richard shot him several times in the chest, pulling the trigger repeatedly until the bullets ran out. Richard went to prison and was sentenced to death. The family was shamed by their religion, despised by their neighbors, and desperate. Kurt’s mother and brother moved to a smaller town, and Kurt struggled on in Vienna. He slept on the couches of friends and scraped out a small income working in a dissecting room at the university.

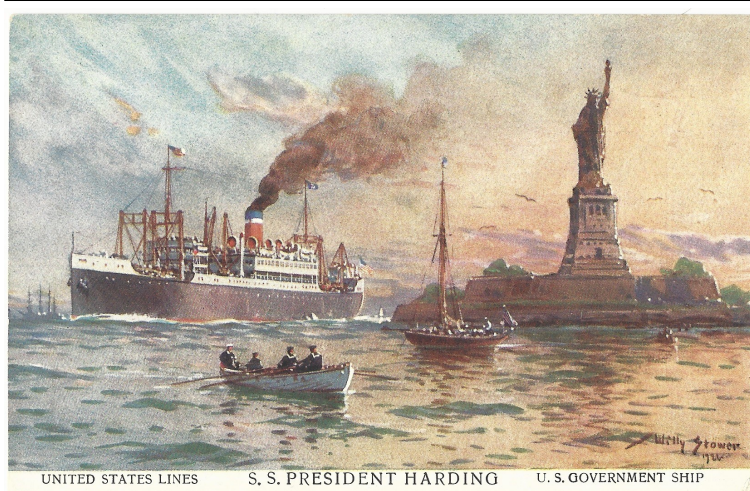
Then came the *Anschluss* on March 12, 1938. After tense negotiations and an aborted referendum, Austria agreed to unite with Germany. As Hitler’s soldiers goose-stepped through Vienna before cheering crowds with

arms raised in allegiance to the man who had promised to eradicate the Jews, Kurt Glaser knew it was time to get out.

With his mother gone and father in prison, Kurt had no support, little money, and few options, when a family friend came to his rescue. The friend took care of the paperwork, provided transit visas through Switzerland, France, and England, and a ticket for a ship from England to Shanghai. But instead of passing through Switzerland in the week allotted by his visa, Kurt let the visa expire and melded into the Swiss Jewish community. Despite the threat of deportation constantly hanging over him, he was able to finish his medical training at the University of Lausanne. And then, in an unexpected stroke of good luck, he acquired an American visa and booked passage on the S.S. *President Harding*, an overpacked American ship on its way from France to New York.

It seemed he was finally out of harm’s way when the *Harding* sailed straight into a massive hurricane. The ship’s physician assigned Glaser to care for the crew. As waves tossed the ship from side to side and passengers flew down hallways and slammed into walls, Kurt used his sparse medical training to save two crew members who would surely have died without him.

The *Harding* docked in New York on October 31, 1939, with its band playing, its flag at half mast, and hundreds of passengers sprawled out on deck



Vintage postcard of S.S. *President Harding* steaming into New York’s harbor. (Courtesy of CardCow.com)

with black eyes, broken bones, and broken backs, as a massive rescue party rushed out to greet them. Kurt Glaser had reached the United States. He had no money. He spoke no English. He had no friends. But he had survived.

In pursuit of a U.S. medical license, Kurt completed an internship at a Chicago hospital in 1941 and spent two years in residency in Louisville. He then served in a variety of positions in pediatrics, including time in Milwaukee and a second stint in Chicago where he worked until 1950. As he went about earning his credentials, Kurt met another refugee, Susanne Stein. They were married, had two sons, and eventually moved to Jerusalem where he was reunited with his mother and brother after ten years apart. As the assistant chief physician in pediatrics at Hadassah University Hospital, he also served on the faculty. In 1954, concerned that he might lose his citizenship if he stayed out of the country for more than five years, he moved his family back to the U.S. He took the position of assistant

professor in pediatrics at the University of Maryland School of Medicine and bought a house on Biltmore Avenue in northwest Baltimore, a side street a few blocks from Pimlico. He lived there for 37 years.

Muncie Adolescent Center and School

While treating children, Kurt noticed that often their physical and psychological health were linked. To become a better pediatrician, he enrolled at the University of Maryland. Over the next six years and while teaching half-time at its school of medicine, he earned a degree in psychiatry. He then found a teaching job at the Rosewood Training Center in Owings Mills, an overcrowded and rundown psychiatric facility about 13 miles from Sykesville. He worked there from 1961 until 1972, eventually becoming its Clinical Director.

In 1971 Springfield Hospital opened the Muncie Adolescent Center and School, an experimental facility for troubled youth, named after a psychiatrist who had helped design the program. Six months after it opened and three decades after he disembarked the *Harding*, Kurt Glaser arrived at Springfield to take over at Muncie. By then Irene Hitchman was working in Baltimore. They had known each other as children in Innsbruck. Kurt was bar mitzvahed under Irene's father, and now 30 years and thousands of miles from their home in the Austrian Alps, they found each other again.

Muncie was new and modern and much nicer than any place else in the aging Springfield complex. There were never more than 30 children, all aged 12 to 18, each in a private room. There was a school that all the students attended. There was art and music and a gym and day trips to Piney Run Park. Kurt's immediate supervisor was Fritz Kobler, another Jew who had journeyed from Vienna to Shanghai to Sykesville, and succeeded Irene Hitchman as Springfield's Clinical Director. Kurt had a small staff and a small group of troubled children. Some were hyperactive. Some were depressed and suicidal. A few were labeled schizophrenics. He had success after nearly a decade at Muncie, but when the state initiated

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
No. 154025
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DECLARATION OF INTENTION
(Invalid for all purposes seven years after the date hereof)

I, KURT GLASER, of the State of Pennsylvania, in the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, District of Philadelphia, Pa.
now residing at 2242 Market Street, PHILADELPHIA, PA.
occupation none, aged 26 years, do declare on oath that my personal description is:
Sex male, color white, complexion fair, color of eyes blue,
color of hair brown, height 5 feet 5 inches; weight 138 pounds; visible distinctive marks
none
race Hebrew, nationality Austria
I was born in Vienna Austria on Feb. 18th, 1915
I am not married. The name of my wife or husband is _____
we were married on _____ at _____
born at _____ (date of birth) _____ (date of birth) _____ (date of birth)
I am _____ (single) _____ (married) _____ (divorced) _____ (widowed)
I have _____ children, and the name, date and place of birth,
and place of residence of each of said children are as follows: _____
I have not heretofore made a declaration of intention: Number _____, on _____, at _____
my last foreign residence was Vienna Austria
I emigrated to the United States of America from Bordeaux France
my lawful entry for permanent residence in the United States was at New York New York
under the name of Kurt Glaser on Oct. 21st, 1939
on the vessel Prinzess Harding
I will, before being admitted to citizenship, renounce absolutely and forever all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or of which I may be at the time of admission a citizen or subject; I am not an anarchist; I am not a polygamist nor a believer in the practice of polygamy; and it is my intention in good faith to become a citizen of the United States of America and to reside permanently therein; and I certify that the photograph affixed to the duplicate and triplicate hereof is a likeness of me.
I swear (affirm) that the statements I have made and the intentions I have expressed in this declaration of intention subscribed by me are true to the best of my knowledge and belief: So help me God.
Kurt Glaser
Subscribed and sworn to before me in the form of oath shown above in the office of the Clerk of said Court, at Philadelphia, Pa. this 12th day of April, Anno Domini, 1940 Certification No. 179353 from the Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization showing the lawful entry of the declarant for permanent residence on the date stated above, has been received by me. The photograph affixed to the duplicate and triplicate hereof is a likeness of the declarant.
GEORGE HEDDICK
Clerk of the U. S. District Court.
Form 2000-1-A 10-11-34 U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE
[See instructions on reverse hereof]

Kurt Glaser began the process of acquiring U.S. citizenship on October 21, 1939, only months after his arrival in the country. (Federal Naturalization Records, Northern District, Illinois)

new policies that made his task more difficult, he moved on to Sheppard Pratt psychiatric hospital in Towson, where he worked until age 70.

Epilogue

Irene Hitchman died on September 28, 1986, at 77. She had been a nurse, a staff psychiatrist, a counselor, a researcher, the clinical director of a major institution, president of the Maryland Psychiatric Association, and a top-level state bureaucrat, who had climbed higher in her profession than any woman before her. She had been retired for seven years when in September of 1981, she attended the opening of Springfield's Irene L. Hitchman Building. Seven years after that, on October 27, 1988, Eva Salomon spoke at the dedication of a new 100-bed facility, named the Salomon Building in her honor.

Kurt Glaser's long journey from the Austrian Alps to Carroll County was momentous and fraught with danger. His father had been hanged for murder. His grandfather, his father's three brothers, and two of their wives died in gas chambers. He refused to let his children learn German. Kurt died in 2009 at the Fairhaven retirement community at the edge of Sykesville. There are no buildings named in his honor. For him, Springfield was one stop near the end of a lifetime.

For Eva Salomon, Springfield represented a whole new life, built nearly from scratch in a new country with a new language. When she turned 70, state regulations required her to retire. She moved across Route 32 and into a small house less than a mile from the home she had moved into with Herman. She collected stuffed animals. She wore big glasses and a patch over one eye. As she grew old and frail, her many friends urged her to move to Fairhaven, but she liked her house and wanted to stay. Born in Germany in 1900, Eva died at her home in Sykesville in 1995, five days short of 95 and 50 years an American citizen.

Built as an asylum for victims of mental illness, Springfield Hospital provided an asylum of a different sort for Kurt, Eva, and Irene. They had found refuge from an evil that killed six million of



Above: Irene Hitchman with family members at the dedication of a Springfield State Hospital building in her honor, 1981.

Below: Retirement dinner for Eva Salomon, seated on left, and Irene Hitchman, on right, 1970. (Images courtesy of Sykesville Gate House)



their people but couldn't reach them in the safety of their adopted home.

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Recent view of the slowly deteriorating Warfield complex (formerly the women's wards) on the Springfield grounds. The future of these historic buildings is currently in doubt. (Courtesy of Sykesville Gate House Museum)

About the Author:

A resident of Sykesville since 1999, Jack McBride White has written extensively on the area's history. He is a friend and former employee of the Historical Society of Carroll County, former curator of the Gate House Museum in Sykesville, and author of the following works of non-fiction: *In Carrie's Footprints-The Long Walk of Warren Dorsey*; *In Search of Helen from Two Locks* (which takes place largely at Springfield); and *Sykesville Stories, Vol 1., the Town that Refused to Die*.

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